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Subject: Weekly Briefing: "Public" is not and should not be a dirty word

NC POLICY WATCH

Stories & voices
that **matter.**

Weekly Briefing:

"Public" is not and should not be a dirty word

The destructive delusions in the Right's opposition to public transit

By [Rob Schofield](#)

The modern day conservative opposition to public transit has always been a bit of a puzzle. For much of the 20th Century, large scale public works – like mass transit systems – were the kinds of public-private partnerships that won the support of many a billionaire business leader. Walt Disney, a ferocious right-winger who battled workers and championed corporate power, still had enough common sense and foresight to build monorails and "people movers" around his amusement parks in the 1950's and 60's and promote them as the transportation systems for cities of the future.

People like Disney didn't back public transit so much because they loved the environment – though they certainly weren't opposed to order, cleanliness or combating pollution. Instead, their top priority was commerce and that meant getting people to and from their jobs, places of business, schools, public spaces and, of course, recreation and entertainment venues.

And so it has been down through the decades with the subway systems of the world's major metropolises. Notwithstanding all of the other benefits, the chief driving force behind them has been about helping businesses and businesspeople make money – not some kind of progressive desire for communal togetherness.

In New York City, lower Manhattan had come to a virtual standstill in the late 19th Century as a chaotic combination of above ground vehicles virtually paralyzed the overpopulated streets and prevented businesses from surviving – much less thriving. Civic and business leaders turned to the construction of a subway system out of necessity and, not coincidentally, as a way of helping developers coherently connect to and populate new neighborhoods on the city's undeveloped fringes. The benefits have been incalculably large.

Undermining transit

Weirdly and frustratingly, however, as progressives have promoted public transit in recent decades as a common good institution that could help business *and* protect the environment by reducing automobile emissions and helping to control sprawl, many conservatives seem to have

felt compelled to stake out an opposing stance. [[Read more...](#)]

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